



TRENDS IN MODERN LITERARY CRITICISM/FUNCTION OF CRITICISM

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ABSTRACT

Every literature has two aspects. These two aspects of literature may be called creation and criticism. Creative writing may be defined as a kind of writing which is new, fresh and original. Shakespeare's plays, Milton's poems, Hardy's novels and Eliot's poetic plays are the instances of creative writing. This kind of writing has its own process, its own movement and its own appeal. Every creative writer looks at the different sections and cross-sections of his society; he draws material for his writings from these places; he thinks and imagines a good deal and it is only then that he creates something. Every kind of creative writing, therefore, is both personal and impersonal at one and the same time. Criticism is different from creation. It is not new or fresh or original in the sense creation is. It is derivative in character because it is a kind of work which is based on creation. Critical writing is not possible without creative writing. If nothing is created, there would be nothing to criticize and comment on. Some people are of the view that creation is health while criticism is disease. This is not a correct and sound attitude. Some critics may be bad and some kind of criticism may be unhealthy, but there is an inner-relationship between creation and criticism. That is why; Eliot says that criticism is as unavoidable and as necessary as breathing. There have been critics for a very long time now. Aristotle was the first major critic of the ancient times. Since then criticism has kept on being written without any break. Dryden, Dr. Johnson, Coleridge and Matthew Arnold have been the major critics in the history of English literature.

KEY WORDS: Criticism, literature, prejudices, trends, Marxist Criticism, psycho-analytical, Frontiers of Criticism, biographical criticism.

EXPLANATION:

In the modern times the critical activity in the field of literature has gone up considerably. Modern criticism is indeed a complex and difficult phenomenon. The reason is that in the present day world, criticism has got mixed up with many other branches of human knowledge and disciplines. The present century has seen the rise of different schools of activity. T.S. Eliot discusses some of these schools in his famous essay "The Frontiers of Criticism". The first important school of modern literary criticism may be called the school 'workshop criticism'. The workshop criticism here does not take us to any factory or workshop or laboratory. This kind of criticism signifies the criticism or comment written by one poet on the writing of any other poet. It has; no doubt, certain advantages because it points out to us in detail the merits and limitations of a particular poet. But it has one great disadvantage. Whenever a poet writes about another poet he writes more about himself than about the poet he is supposed to discuss. Moreover, workshop criticism generally turns out to be a bundle of prejudices and whims.

The second important school of modern literary criticism may be called the school of psychological or psycho-analytical criticism. This kind of criticism has its own value and importance. Psychological or psycho-analytical critics analyze the character or personality of a writer. They generally apply the theories of Freud, Alder and Jung to the study of literature. As we go through these critical writings we get new set of information about different authors and poets. But the trouble with this kind of criticism lies in the fact that it tells us more about the personality or character of a writer than about his writings. The result is that we lose sight of our main object.

In the modern times a political kind of critical activity has come up which is known as Marxist criticism. Marxist school of criticism is based on the principles and theories of Marx. Marx was a great socialist thinker; he divided the world into different classes. He spoke of class-struggle and he said that it was necessary to have a classless society. Communism is Marxism in action. The Marxist critics examine literature in terms of capitalism and socialism, prosperity and poverty, bread and hunger. They have nothing to do with the technique of literature. They are interested in one and only one thing and that is the content or theme of literature. If the theme of a novel does not refer to the class struggle, they say that it is a bad novel. Marxist criticism has its own rules, its own sets of values, its own principles to judge the goodness or badness of literature.

There are several other schools of modern literary criticism, such as scholarship and criticism, historical criticism, biographical criticism, and like scholarship has its own approach to literature. In recent times a lot of books have come out in which it is not actually the poem that is examined; what is examined is the source or sources of the poem. This kind of criticism may be useful in its own way but it certainly does not tell us anything important about a particular poem or novel. Historical criticism examines literature with reference to the age in which a book is written and perhaps everything about that age is given. Similarly, biographical criticism tells us about the history of a writer's life, his likes, his points of strength and weakness. But really speaking, biographical or historical criticism does not help us much in our study of literature.

These different schools of modern literary criticism may or may not help us. The real thing to know is as to what should be the function or business literary criticism. We must try to determine whether criticism should tell us more about the writer than about his writing or should it concentrate itself completely on literature. These critics, who practice textual criticism, tell us that literary criticism should have nothing to do with the writers and that it should devote itself only to the study of literature. The real function of literary criticism consists in two things. In the first place, it must give us one of the true meaning or significance of literature. Secondly, it should try to create a kind of climate in which a real taste for literary appreciation is formed. In other words, the true function of literary criticism is to help us in our understanding and enjoyment of literature, it does this, it should be said to have served its purpose very well.

In his essay entitled, 'The Function of Criticism', T.S. Eliot tells us that analysis and comparison are the two tools of criticism and that the purpose of function of criticism is to elucidate the works of art and thus, to correct the taste of a common reader. In his later essay entitled, 'The Frontiers of Criticism', Eliot maintains the thesis that the business of criticism is to inculcate in us an attitude or spirit leading to a proper understanding of literature. Eliot further says that true understanding of literature or poetry is the same as the true enjoyment of literature or poetry. There is no basic difference between these two significant statements of T.S. Eliot because this central idea consists in the fact that criticism, true criticism should always guide us and modify our taste. In his book 'The Sacred Wood', Eliot refers to what he calls perfect critics and imperfect critics. He, thereby, means that there is a kind of criticism which we may call perfect and that there is also a different type of criticism which we may call imperfect criticism. The crux of the whole matter is that criticism should function as an honest and competent guide to creation. This should be the beginning and the end, the sole intention of critical endeavor, later

Patel is of the view that criticism is the art of interpreting art. It is an intermediary between the author and therefore the reader by explaining one to the opposite. By his special aptitude and training, the critic feels the virtue of a masterpiece disengages it and sets it forth. According to Carlyle, criticism stands like an interpreter between the inspired and therefore the uninspired, between the prophet and people who hear the melody of his words and catch some glimpse of their material meaning but understand not their deeper meaning. We may say that with the help of criticism we know the real meaning or significance of a piece of literature. This suggests the narrow view of the function of criticism. In its wider application, Matthew Arnold defines criticism as a disinterested endeavor to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world. He further says that criticism is an endeavor, in all branches of knowledge, theology, philosophy, science and art to see the objects in itself, it really is. Its tendency is to make the best ideas prevail and as the ideas reach society they generate the style from which come the creative epochs in literature.

Different critics and writers have expressed their opinions on the function and business of criticism in different ways. The truth, however, remains that the Frontiers of criticism is to bring about such a men orientated as may help the readers

towards a healthy appreciation or enjoyment of literature.

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